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Emigre Tells of Research in Soviet In Parapsychology for Military Use

By FLORA LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

PARIS, June 18—An emigre Soviet physicist says that the Soviet Union has been doing secret work in parapsychology, for what appear to be military and police purposes.

The Soviet emigre, August Stern, who now lives in Paris, spent three years in a secret Siberian laboratory in the late 1960's trying to find a physical basis for psychic energy, or "psi particles," as they are called.

Moscow's interest in the subject was demonstrated in the case of Robert C. Toth, a correspondent of The Los Angeles Times, who was interrogated this week in Moscow by the K.G.B., the security police, and was accused of having received "state secrets" about parapsychology. He was allowed to leave for home after protests by the United States Government.

[In Washington, officials said the intelligence community was aware of Soviet research in parapsychology, but added that American specialists did not believe the Russians had made any unusual discoveries. One official said

some Soviet work appeared aimed at developing psychological warfare methods.]

The Toth incident had the earmarks of an entrapment, in the view of some diplomats. There is no sign that the 25-page document on parapsychology handed to him on the street just before he was seized contained important information. However, there is a record of Soviet sensitivity and August Stern's information indicates that parapsychology is a matter of concern to the authorities.

Mr. Stern is a son of Dr. Mikhail Stern, an endocrinologist who was imprisoned before being allowed to leave the Soviet Union in March. August Stern said he was told before leaving the Soviet Union two years ago that an even more secret laboratory than the one he knew in Siberia had been set up in Moscow under the direction of the K.G.B.

A French scientist and former intelligence agent, Jacques Bergier, has written a book saying that extrasensory percep-

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Emigre Reports on Soviet Research

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tion, one of the theories studied by parapsychology, may be used in espionage, thought control, surveillance and as a form of weapon.

Parapsychology covers four specific fields of nonphysical phenomena. They are telepathy (transmission of thought without use of the senses), extrasensory perception, telekinesis (transmission of motion without any evident use of physical energy) and clairvoyance (the ability to see distant or future events without physical intervention).

Most scientists remain skeptical that such phenomena actually exist, but there are researchers throughout the world dedicated to proving and, if possible, explaining them.

Formal, officially subsidized Soviet research in the field has gone on for years, sometimes publicly vaunted and at other times denounced and even denied.

U.S. Navy Was Interested in 1950's

At one time in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the United States Navy and the Stanford Research Institute did experiments in telepathy to see whether it could provide an undetectable means of communicating with submarines. So far as is known, the experiments failed. But word of them reached Moscow and apparently provoked high-level interest in the subject.

In 1975 some Soviet parapsychologists were persecuted and the whole subject was publicly attacked. Eduard Naumov, a researcher with no evident connection with the military or police, was tried on a charge of accepting fees for lectures without permission, and was sentenced to two years in labor camp. His colleagues were dismissed from their jobs and otherwise harassed. At the trial, much was made of the fact that he had contacts with Western parapsychologists.

Later, on June 13, 1975, Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, urged the United States to agree on a ban of research and development of new kinds of weapons "more terrible" than anything the world has known. American arms control negotiators have tried to find out from their Soviet counterparts what he had in mind, but they have not learned anything more than that he meant "some kind of rays," according to United States officials.

Vasillating Treatment Noted

At first, American intelligence thought he might have been referring to laser beams, or some way of focusing cosmic rays, but they no longer believe this to be the case. They say that they are baffled by the reference.

There is no evidence that Mr. Brezhnev



Associated Press

Robert C. Toth, Los Angeles Times correspondent, in London yesterday.

was referring to something in the field of parapsychology. But it is a possibility that has occurred to some observers, especially because of the vacillating treatment of parapsychologists, the evident involvement of the K.G.B. with the subject, and what some regard as a traditional Russian interest in mysticism.

After his initial detention a week ago, Mr. Toth was reported to have quoted from a statement made by an employee of the Academy of Sciences who had been called by the authorities to examine the documents in his possession. The statement referred to "psi particles" and said "this material is secret and shows the kind of work done in some closed scientific institutes of our state."

Last year, the Paris newspaper Le Monde published a letter by a Russian named Vladimir Lvov denouncing a previous letter by a French professor, Henri Gastaut, and denying that parapsychology research was officially supported in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Lvov was identified by Le Monde as a "Soviet scientific writer in Leningrad," but Western sources said they believed he was connected with the K.G.B. The French professor had simply mentioned, in the course of a plea for support of parapsychology research, that the Russians were engaged in it.

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in Parapsychology for Military Uses

The reply, titled "Myths and Realities in the Soviet Union," and published on Aug. 4, 1976, Mr. Lvov said:

"The truth is simple. There is no parapsychology as a legitimate and officially recognized branch of Soviet science. No institute or scientific research center in the U. S. S. R. is occupied with telepathy, psychokinesis, etc. But there are a few groups of amateurs... who look into the 'paranormal' with the aid of some journalists without scruples of scientific exactitude."

Yet, soon after the trial of Mr. Naumov, the Soviet parapsychologist, a report to The Times of London said the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences had declared the study of psychic phenomena a subject fit for scientific study, and therefore not a permissible field for unofficial researchers.

Mr. Stern's reminiscences of the laboratory where he worked and the way it was finally shut down only add to the public record. The laboratory was in Novosibirsk's Science City, a complex belonging to the Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences. It was in a separate building, and the door could be opened only by a coded lock with the code changed every week. It was known as "Special Department No. 8" and was referred to as a branch of the Institute of Automation and Electrometry.

Headed by a Navy Officer

The head was Vitaly Perov, a navy officer, who opened it in 1966, Mr. Stern said. He recalled that Mr. Perov showed deference to two visitors who came in the early days to check on the installation. Mr. Stern believed the visitors to be K.G.B. men.

Workers were recruited from around the country until there were about 60 persons at the laboratory. The scientists among them were given virtually unlimited funds for elaborate equipment. "It cost many millions," Mr. Stern said. His own work was in theoretical physics. His view was that there might be an orderly system in which all kinds of energy could be charted, similar to Mendeleyev's periodic table of chemical elements. As a result of the periodic table, which originally left some blank spaces, unknown elements system.

If such a chart could be discovered for energy, Mr. Stern thought, it, too, might be found to have blank spaces that might lead to physical identification of particles to explain the mystery of psychic energy, the "psi particles."

He worked for two years and found

nothing. Other experiments at the laboratory involved applying electric shocks to newly-born kittens to see whether their mothers, three floors upstairs, registered any reaction through some mental connection; television surveillance of people in a room to see whether they responded to attempts by others several rooms away to send them telepathic orders; studies involving monkeys and electromagnetic fields.

There were also experiments with photon waves, in which frogs' eyes were used as a more sensitive measuring instrument than a machine. One involved putting bacteria on two sides of a glass plate to see whether a fatal disease could be transmitted through the glass. It was reasoned that if this could be done, it would show that photons—light particles—were accounted for some inexplicable forms of communication.

Suddenly, in 1969, the laboratory was shut down. Mr. Stern said he did not know the reason and did not think it was really the team's lack of success or the poor quality of its science, as officially suggested at the time, but a change of attitude or power balance in the Kremlin.

Leningrad Project Was Canceled

He was back in Moscow by then. He heard that the military, and particularly the navy, was conducting parapsychology research in Leningrad.

A friend of his, a Leningrad scientist named Gennadi Sergeyev, told him he was receiving permission and funds to open a new laboratory and offered him a job. But the project was canceled.

Later, friends told Mr. Stern that the work done in Novosibirsk and planned in Leningrad had been combined in a new laboratory in Moscow under the auspices of the K.G.B. He never learned any more about it.

By the time he left in 1974, he was told that all parapsychology work had been curtailed except for the secret K.G.B. laboratory. He said he had heard rumors that something "important, very dangerous" had been discovered, but he commented:

"I never believed it. How can the K.G.B. do effective research? They need real scientists."

His experience in Novosibirsk had convinced him that many researchers with official sponsorship were poorly qualified or even quacks and their claims could not be substantiated. His own research papers were confiscated before he emigrated.